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I. COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE CONSIDERS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PEACE PROCESS, SITUATION IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

On 9 September 1996, the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following statement on the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations (GA/PAL/734):

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People wishes to express its satisfaction at the resumption on 4 September, at Beit Hanoun, Gaza Strip, of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

The Bureau welcomes the meeting between the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, as an important step towards the full implementation of the agreements already reached between the two sides. The Bureau also hopes that the meeting will clear the way for the continuation of substantive discussions on matters pertaining to the permanent status.

The Bureau reiterates the Committee's strong support for the current peace process and its determination to spare no effort in promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and statehood.

Subsequently, on 20 September 1996, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held its 223rd meeting to discuss recent political developments in the occupied Palestinian territory and to hear a report by its Chairman on the International Non-Governmental Organization Meeting/European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, held at Geneva from 2 to 4 September on the theme of building an NGO partnership for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine (see section below). With regard to political developments, the Chairman of the Committee, H. E. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), said that certain measures taken by the Israeli Government had created new and significant obstacles for the peace process, undermining confidence and posing a genuine threat to a just and lasting peace (see GA/PAL/735).

On 26 September 1996, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, H.E. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), addressed the following letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (A/51/418-S/1996/795):

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to express the greatest anxiety at the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory following Israel's decision to open a new entrance to the archaeological tunnel in East Jerusalem which runs under Arab property along the western wall of the Al-Haram al-Sharif, the third-largest site of Islam.

According to reports in the media, protest demonstrations by Palestinians were met with live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas by Israeli troops. Clashes have taken place in the West Bank towns of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Halhoul near Hebron, Jenin, and Qalqilya, as well as in the Gaza Strip. There have been reports that Israeli troops entered areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, and that gunfire was exchanged with Palestinian policemen. The latest press dispatches indicate that 40 Palestinians and 11 Israelis have been killed, and several hundred have been injured, the highest toll since the intifadah.

The Committee wishes to remind the international community that these tragic developments follow repeated warnings about the devastating consequences for Palestinian hopes and

living conditions, of the delayed implementation by Israel of the agreements already reached, its prolonged closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the resumption of land confiscation and settlement, and actions against Palestinian property and institutions in Jerusalem. The Committee believes that current events demonstrate the fragility of the peace process and calls on Israel urgently to reverse its measures, to promote reconciliation with the Palestinian people and to resume substantive negotiations towards a just final settlement in accordance with international legitimacy.

The Committee further believes that the current serious situation engages the responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of peace and security in the area, and associates itself with the call for an urgent meeting of the Council to consider the developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

II. SECRETARY-GENERAL ISSUES STATEMENT EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION IN JERUSALEM, THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

On 26 September 1996, the Secretary-General issued the following statement on the situation in the Middle East (SG/SM/6065):

26 September 1996

The Secretary-General is gravely concerned over the clashes which have erupted in the West Bank and Gaza. He deplores the escalation of violence in which, until now, dozens of Palestinians and several Israelis have been killed, and in which hundreds have been wounded.

The Secretary-General urges restraint and appeals for a halt to any provocative action. He calls on both the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to bring an immediate end to the violence and prevent further casualties.

He also calls on the parties to resume in earnest negotiations that will lead to full implementation of the agreements already reached.

III. SECURITY COUNCIL MEETS ON THE SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

The Security Council met on 27 and 28 September 1996 in response to the requests contained in letters dated 26 September 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of September 1996, and Egypt addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1996/790 and S/1996/792) (see S/PV.3698 and resumptions 1 and 2).

The Council had before it the following other documents: letters dated 23, 24, 25 and 26 September 1996, respectively, from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/1996/772, S/1996/779, S/1996/786 and S/1996/791); a letter dated 26 September 1996 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/1996/793); and a letter dated 26 September 1996 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General (S/1996/795).

The Chairman of the Committee, H.E. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), intervened in the debate as follows:

(*Interpretation from French*): Allow me at the outset to convey to you, Sir, in my capacity as the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, my warm congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of September. I should also like to express my gratitude to the members of the Security Council for having been kind enough to authorize me to speak at this meeting, and to share with them the Committee's appreciation for the speed with which they acceded to the request of the Arab Group to hold an emergency meeting devoted essentially to the flare-up of tensions in the land of Palestine.

Between 1993 and September 1995, the international community welcomed with joy and relief the signing of several historic agreements between President Arafat and the late Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzak Rabin. Those agreements crowned years of negotiations that were intended to reach a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and over and above the question of Palestine to end the painful conflict that has raged in the Middle East for several decades.

This same international community had hailed with optimism the effective implementation in the field of the practical arrangements of the different accords and agreements calling for the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza and Jericho, the redeployment of Israeli forces and the establishment of the Palestinian authority.

Dreams began to become reality with the first free and democratic elections held on Palestinian land. This hope for peace finally regained between Israel and its Arab neighbours was further nourished by the process of dialogue that had also begun between Israel and Syria and which left us hope for a peaceful political settlement to the question of the occupied Arab Golan.

All of us had hoped that this much-desired peace process was finally established, and that the return to the logic of war, hatred and frustration of all kinds had been banished forever. The tragic events taking place before our eyes today in the occupied Arab territories once again highlight the precariousness of the situation in the Middle East and just how dangerous Israeli practices are for the present peace process.

The decision recently taken by the Israeli Government to open a tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem, the holiest of sites, following the sealing of Palestinian territory, both within Palestine and in its relations with the exterior, for several months; the confiscation of Arab lands to build settlements or roads around areas inhabited by Palestinians; and the measures of intimidation taken against the Arab civilian population show that Israel wishes to stifle the occupied territories economically and to deny the Palestinian people their right to exercise their legitimate rights to self-determination and to establish an independent state, in keeping with international legality and the relevant resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council.

It is therefore important for the international community to exert pressure and take the measures necessary so that the inhumane sealing off of the territories and the restrictions on the movements of Palestinians imposed by the occupying authorities are lifted; that the redeployment of Israeli troops from the city of Hebron on the West Bank should take place as called for in the interim peace accords signed by the former Israeli Government; that construction and expansion of settlements should cease; that the tunnel be closed once and for all; and that, finally, the protagonists, in order not to prove right the enemies of peace, resume the peace process that has been under way since 1993.

Given the Israeli attitude since June 1996, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People continues to be very much concerned, by the situation created by Israel, on behalf of its own security and to the detriment of an entire people whose legitimate aspiration is to live in peace on the soil of its homeland.

The Palestinian authorities have clearly shown their aspirations to live in peace, in dignity and

justice with their neighbours by courageously embarking upon peace negotiations with the Israeli party since 1991, and by taking since then widely known political measures. It is through this inevitable coexistence that, in the final analysis, the Middle East, a crossroads of history and of the world, will become a region of opportunities, an area of economic growth and political stability.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People remains convinced that many Israelis are still firmly committed to the peace process and condemn the delaying measures of their Government, which would hold back the march of history.

Strengthened by this conviction, and in my capacity as the Chairman of the Committee on Palestine, I would like to take the opportunity of this meeting to make an urgent appeal to the Israeli authorities to ask them to reconsider their present policy of scorn and confrontation, and to commit themselves resolutely, as the international community has constantly called for, to recreate the conditions for a climate of confidence and hope by putting the peace process back on the right track - that of a peace that is profitable to both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

At its 3698th meeting, on 28 September 1996, the Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), which reads as follows:

The Security Council,

Having considered the letter dated 26 September 1996 from the representative of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the States Members of the League of Arab States, contained in document S/1996/790, that referred to the action by the Government of Israel to open an entrance to a tunnel in the vicinity of Al Aqsa Mosque and its consequent results,

Expressing its deep concern about the tragic events in Jerusalem and the areas of Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip, which resulted in a high number of deaths and injuries among the Palestinian civilians, and concerned also about the clashes between the Israeli army and the Palestinian police and the casualties on both sides,

Recalling its resolutions on Jerusalem and other relevant Security Council resolutions,

Having discussed the situation at its formal meeting on 27 September 1996, with the participation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of a number of countries,

Concerned about the difficulties facing the Middle East peace process and the deterioration of the situation, including inter alia its impact on the living conditions of the Palestinian people, and urging the parties to fulfil their obligations, including the agreements already reached,

Concerned about developments at the Holy Places of Jerusalem,

1. Calls for the immediate cessation and reversal of all acts which have resulted in the aggravation of the situation, and which have negative implications for the Middle East peace process;

2. Calls for the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians to be ensured;

3. Calls for the immediate resumption of negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis and the timely implementation of the agreements reached;

4. Decides to follow closely the situation and to remain seized of the matter.

Adopted by a vote of 14 in favour, none against, with 1 abstention.

IV. UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING/EUROPEAN NGO SYMPOSIUM HELD AT GENEVA

The United Nations International NGO Meeting/European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine was held as a combined event under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 2 to 4 September 1996. The meeting was convened in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 50/84 A and B of 15 December 1995, and was attended by 21 panelists and workshop leaders and by the representatives of 80 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 16 of them as observers. It was also attended by 26 Governments, 9 United Nations agencies and bodies, 3 intergovernmental organizations, 4 NGO coordinating committees and a delegation of Palestine.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was represented by a delegation composed of Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee and head of the delegation; Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman; Mr. Joseph Cassar (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee; Mr. Pedro Núñez-Mosquera (Cuba); and Mr. M. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine).

The programme for the meeting was formulated by the Committee taking into account suggestions made by members of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ICCP) and the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ECCP) at the consultations between the Committee and NGO representatives held in New York on 1 and 2 February 1996 and in subsequent consultations with the chairpersons of both the ICCP and ECCP. The central theme of the combined meeting was "Building NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine".

At the opening session, a message from Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, was delivered by his representative, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Under-Secretary-General and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Mr. Ka spoke in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. A statement was made by Mr. As'ad Abdul Rahman, Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine. Statements were also made by Mr. Don Betz, Chairman of ICCP, Mr. John Gee, Chairman of ECCP, and Mr. Talal Shubeilat, representative of the League of Arab States.

The invited experts made presentations in three plenary sessions, which were followed by discussion. In the first plenary session, entitled "Recent political developments", Mr. Ziad Abu Amr, member of the Palestinian Council, spoke on the status of the implementation of the concluded agreements; Mr. Azmi Bishara, member of the Knesset for the National Democratic Assembly and Mr. Yossi Katz, member of the Knesset for the Labour Party, spoke on the Israeli elections and Israeli public opinion. Presentations on Arab and international reaction to the recent political developments were made by Mr. Ahmed Hamroush, President of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity and Mr. Michael Hindley, Member of the European Parliament for the Socialist Party, United Kingdom.

The second plenary session was entitled "Key issues of a just and comprehensive settlement". Presentations on the subtheme "Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory" were made by Mr. Sharif S. Elmusa, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, D.C.; Ms. Zahaba Galón, Secretary-General of Ratz; Mr. Geoffrey Aronson, Editor at the Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington, D.C.; and Mr. Jan de Jong, Geographer and Planning Consultant at the St. Yves Legal Resource and Development Center, Jerusalem. Mr. Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Middle East History and Director of the Center for International Studies at Chicago University; Mr. Avishai Margalit, Professor of Philosophy

at Hebrew University, Jerusalem; and Mr. Leonard Hausman, Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, made presentations on the subtheme "Palestine refugees and displaced persons". On the issue of "Jerusalem", presentations were made by Mr. Albert Aghazarian, Director for Public Relations, Bir Zeit University; Mr. Gershon Baskin, Co-Director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Jerusalem; Mr. David Andrews, Spokesman for the Fianna Fail for Tourism and Trade, Member of Dail Eriann, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland; and Mr. Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, Member of the European Parliament for the European People's Party, Greece.

The third plenary session was entitled "Building NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement". Presentations were made by Mr. Marai Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General of the Palestine Committee for NGOs, Director-General of the Arab and International Relations Department of the PLO; Mr. Michael Warschawski, Director of the Alternative Information Center, Jerusalem; Mr. Mustafa Barghouthi, Director of the Health Development Information Project, Jerusalem; Mr. Don Betz, Chairman of the ICCP; and Mr. John Gee, Chairman of the ECCP.

In addition to the plenary sessions, a number of workshops were held concurrently for participants interested in developing specific action-oriented proposals. The workshop topics were linked to those addressed in the plenary sessions.

The participating NGOs adopted the following final statement:

We, the non-governmental organizations gathered together at the United Nations International NGO Meeting and European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, are aware that this is an important moment in the history of the Palestinian people.

We have welcomed the positive developments associated with the Middle East peace process, but note with great concern the repeated delays in the implementation of the letter and spirit of the agreements. Specifically, we believe that certain measures by the Israeli Government have created new, significant obstacles for the peace process. Israeli actions undermine confidence and generate insecurity among the Palestinian people and pose a genuine threat to securing a just and lasting peace.

Unequivocal NGO support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the right of return and to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions remains at the center of our NGO commitment. Further, we believe that the United Nations has a key role to play in reaching a negotiated settlement on the question of Palestine and is the most appropriate body to guarantee a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Although the resolution of the questions relating to Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and the right of return has been deferred to the permanent status negotiations, we NGOs clearly reaffirm their fundamental importance to any just and lasting peace. We firmly oppose any Israeli action designed to predetermine the final outcome of the talks. These permanent status issues must be resolved on the basis of the various United Nations resolutions, and of justice and international law.

We call upon all NGOs to make concerted efforts to publicize any Israeli violation of Palestinian human rights. Of continuing and major concern to us is the ongoing incarceration of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. We reiterate our call for their unconditional release in compliance with relevant agreements reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Further, we declare that, as NGOs, we have an obligation to lobby our governments regarding these concerns.

We note with great concern the intimidation and closure of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem.

As in the past, we condemn this practice, which endangers the peace process, and call upon all NGOs to register their strongest protests with their Governments and with the Government of Israel.

We request that the countries hosting Palestinian refugees observe and preserve their civil, social and political rights until they are allowed to exercise their right of return. NGOs should make special efforts to aid Palestinian refugees in these areas and to publicize their status and demands.

We urge the development of Israeli-Palestinian NGO cooperation. It should be based on mutual understanding and a commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. This cooperation is important to the peace process and the Palestinian quest for self-determination. Fresh initiatives to achieve this goal should be undertaken.

We strongly denounce the continuous acts of intimidation, humiliation and punishment by Israel against Palestinians. Such actions include the closure of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, travel restrictions, hampering of freedom of worship and movement and the ability to deliver needed supplies and necessities, particularly, the free movement of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank, which is vital to the social and economic development of the Palestinian people. These are examples of multiple and persistent Israeli restrictions which abuse economic devastation, waste of resources and disrupt the daily lives of Palestinians as well as the work of international and Palestinian NGOs.

We NGOs call on the international community to fulfill the commitments undertaken to assist the Palestinian people's effort in nation-building and political, economic as well as social development in order to minimize the economic and social impact of Israeli restrictive measures.

We NGOs request the international community, and particularly the United States and the European Union, to urge Israel to comply with all its obligations under the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to observe its obligations as imposed by international treaties, conventions and United Nations resolutions. As NGOs, we continue to uphold the principle that Israel, as the occupying Power, remains obligated to observe the Fourth Geneva Convention until such time as the Palestinian people have achieved full sovereignty.

We NGOs, engaged in helping the process of building the Palestinian State, congratulate the Palestinian Authority for the conduct of their first elections. We reaffirm our support of the consolidation of the rule of law, democratic values, political pluralism and the full enjoyment of all inalienable rights by the Palestinian people.

In keeping with the theme of this year's meeting, the ICCP and ECCP intend to use this coming year to appraise the ways and means in which they can be most effective in assisting the Palestinian people in realizing their national objectives. Specifically, we will seek to generate public support internationally for the Palestinian people through campaigns around the themes of the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and their expansion in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and the Palestinian refugees' right of return. We will review our cooperative relationships with one another and the other coordinating bodies as well as our working relationship with the United Nations Committee and Division with the clear aim of creating stronger partnerships.

We warmly thank the Committee for convening this combined meeting and symposium. We genuinely appreciate the work done by the Division and the conference staff in facilitating our sessions. We acknowledge and appreciate the messages of support from the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, and United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. We further appreciate the statements supporting the NGO movement and activities made by the Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka.

We affirm our interest in continuing and expanding NGO cooperation with the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights. We request the Committee's and Division's assistance in accessing

other United Nations agencies and in identifying United Nations programs and resources that can assist the NGOs in realizing their objectives.

We respectfully request the Chairman of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to convey this communiqué to the General Assembly at its 51st session as part of the Committee's report.

V. UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COORDINATOR IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES RESIGNS

On 26 October 1996, the Spokesman for the Secretary-General informed correspondents of the resignation of Mr. Terje Roed Larsen, United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, who had returned to the Cabinet of his Government in Norway. The Secretary-General congratulated him and said "Norway's gain is our loss". The Secretary-General also spoke of the outstanding job done by Mr. Larsen and said the United Nations was very grateful for all his work.

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General asked Peter Hansen, head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to take over Mr. Larsen's duties provisionally, in addition to his work with UNRWA.

VI. UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD ADOPTS DECISIONS ON THE PEACE PROCESS AND JERUSALEM

UNESCO's Executive Board, at its 150th session, held at Paris from 14 to 31 October 1996, adopted decisions on the Middle East peace process and Jerusalem, reflected in press release OPI/NYO/96-10S. The relevant excerpt of the press release reads as follows:

Among the decisions adopted, the Board expressed its "deep concern over the delay in the implementation of the Oslo Agreement" and requested that Israel reopen the Palestinian educational and cultural institutions in Hebron and East Jerusalem it has closed.

It asked the Director-General to do his utmost to obtain free movement of Palestinian students from Gaza to attend colleges and universities in the West Bank, and vice versa. It also invited him to provide assistance to schools in the occupied Arab territories to preserve Syrian Arab cultural identity and to create a special fund from voluntary contributions for Palestinian higher education.

In a decision concerning Jerusalem, the board deplored the opening of the tunnel running along the western wall of the Haram ash-Sharif and extending to Bab al-Fawaghr, "an act which has offended religious sensibilities throughout the world". It requested Israeli authorities to return the tunnel to its prior state and expressed "its great apprehension at the retarding of the peace process and the delay in the implementation of the agreements in this connection".

VII. COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE, AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL, ISSUES SPECIAL COMMUNIQUÉ ON JERUSALEM

On 26 September 1996, the Committee on Palestine of the Organization of the Islamic Conference met at the ministerial level and issued a special communiqué on Jerusalem, which is reproduced below.

Jerusalem, Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the first qibla and the third holy sanctuary, shall always remain the heart of the Islamic Ummah, and the mission of restoring Palestinian, Arab and Islamic rights in Al-Quds Al-Sharif remains a central mission of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The holy places of the three monotheistic religions make this great city a cradle of humanity and a place for peace and coexistence. The whole world has a vested interest in the Holy City, which should be respected at all times.

Accordingly, the Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference considered the extremely dangerous situation in Jerusalem resulting from continuous Israeli measures to create new demographic and administrative facts in the drive to achieve the judaization of the city and from the Israeli Government's refusal to fulfil its commitments made in the ongoing peace process. The Ministers in particular considered the recent illegal act by the Israeli authorities to open a tunnel under the Western Wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the provocative attempts to permit the observance of Jewish religious rites in the holy sanctuary of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The Ministers condemned all those Israeli actions and called for the immediate cessation of such actions. In particular, they condemned the recent Israeli oppressive measures against the Palestinian people, including the use of gunfire, which resulted in scores of casualties, and they called for the immediate closing of the tunnel under Al-Aqsa Mosque. They also called for the lifting of the restrictions and the closure imposed on Jerusalem by the occupying authorities.

The Ministers recalled the positions of the international community on Jerusalem, especially Security Council resolutions 250 (1968), 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 476 (1980) and 672 (1990). They affirmed that all Israeli measures and actions which aim at changing the status of Jerusalem are illegal and invalid and shall remain so.

The Ministers expressed their full support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to end the Israeli occupation of their land and to establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

The Ministers expressed their support for the Middle East peace process and expressed the hope that the process would move forward, provided that Israel respects the basis of the process and the agreement reached.

The Ministers called upon the international community and the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations to uphold the just positions, based on international law and justice, on the issue of Jerusalem and to take measures to prevent the further deterioration of the situation.

VIII. MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL, AT ITS SIXTIETH SESSION, ISSUES COMMUNIQUÉ

The Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held its sixtieth regular session at the seat of its secretariat in Riyadh on 7 and 8 September 1996 under the chairmanship of the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman. The following are excerpts from the press statement, pertaining to the peace process in the Middle East (A/51/387-S/1996/767):

The Council reviewed developments in the peace process in the Middle East and the meetings that had recently taken place between the parties concerned, and it expressed the hope that the forward momentum of the peace process would be renewed. The Council nevertheless continues to view the policy guidelines announced by the Israeli Government with deep concern, given that they reflect an insistence on perpetuating the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, on maintaining

the annexation of East Jerusalem, on rejecting the establishment of a Palestinian State, on refusing to withdraw from the Golan and on retaining and expanding the Jewish settlements in Arab territory. The Council expressed deep concern that such Israeli policies and policy statements might undermine the peace process and bring about a return of tension with all its attendant dangers and possible consequences.

The final communiqué of the Arab Summit Conference and the positions consistently adopted by the GCC States call for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, and they stress the necessity and importance of continuing the peace process and of the concrete implementation of all the agreements thus far concluded. This includes the fulfilment by Israel of its commitment to withdraw its forces from Hebron and the resumption of the final-status negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority and of negotiations on the other tracks, given that peace is a strategic choice to which there is no alternative. The Council hopes that Israel will make the same solemn commitment without procrastination and without resort to language of defiance and confrontation and that it will endeavour to carry the peace process through to completion so as to restore the legitimate rights of all parties and guarantee the balanced and equal security of all the States of the region in fulfilment of the aspirations of its peoples to embark upon an era of economic and social development.

The Council, calling for the resumption of the negotiations on all tracks, affirms that the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1987) and the principle of land for peace, will require: the complete withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Palestinian territories, including Arab Jerusalem; the ability of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with its capital at Jerusalem; complete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan to the boundary of 4 June 1967; and complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the Western Bekaa to the internationally recognized boundaries.

Commending the firmly established international consensus in support of the peace process, as embodied in the statements issued by the European Union at its Florence meeting, by the group of seven industrialized countries at its Lyon summit meeting, by the Casablanca Islamic Summit Conference and by the Cartagena Summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Council urges the co-sponsors of the Madrid Peace Conference, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, to continue to make the most strenuous efforts to ensure that the peace process continues and that the negotiations are resumed and continued until the desired peace is achieved. The Council further renews its call to the international community to honour the undertakings given with respect to the provision of economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Council affirmed that Israel must accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and submit all of its nuclear facilities to the International Atomic Energy Agency inspection regime. It renews its call for the Middle East, including the Gulf region, to be transformed into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, while stressing that it is the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East that will bring real security to all the States of the region.

IX. DECLARATION BY THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

On 1 October 1996, the European Union issued a declaration on the Middle East peace process (A/51/447-S/1996/825, annex):

The Council of Ministers of the European Union is appalled by the recent violence and the resulting casualties in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It offers its sincere

condolences to the families of those Palestinians and Israelis who have lost their lives, and its sympathy to the injured.

The European Union strongly calls upon both parties to abide by Security Council resolution 1073 (1996) of 28 September 1996. The European Union calls upon both the Israeli authorities and the Palestinians to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any actions or words that might lead to further violence. It urges both sides to avoid resorting to disproportionate force, in particular the use of firearms, tanks and helicopter gunships. It calls on the Government of Israel to prevent its forces from re-entering autonomous areas in Zone A, contrary to the spirit and the letter of the Interim Agreement. It further calls on the Palestinian Authority to exert full control over Palestinian forces and to maintain calm in the autonomous area.

The Troika has discussed the Union's concerns at meetings in New York with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and in Luxembourg with President Yasser Arafat.

The European Union recognizes that the recent incidents were precipitated by frustration and exasperation at the absence of any real progress in the peace process and firmly believes that the absence of such progress is the root of the unrest. It calls on Israel to match its stated commitment to the peace process with concrete actions to fulfil its obligations, as well as to refrain from any action likely to create mistrust about its intentions.

The Union notes that the particular events that triggered the current crisis concerned the fears of Palestinians that their position in Jerusalem was being further eroded. The Union recalls that parties have agreed, under the terms of the Declaration of Principles, not to take any action that would prejudge the outcome of the permanent status negotiations. It will work to ensure that this commitment is implemented by both sides. Following Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), the Union believes that it would help greatly to restore calm and confidence if the Hasmonean tunnel in Jerusalem were restored to its original state. It furthermore calls for the cessation and reversal of all acts that may affect the status of the Holy Places in Jerusalem.

The European Union reaffirms its policy on the status of Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, notably the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and is therefore not under Israeli sovereignty. The Union asserts that the Fourth Geneva Convention is fully applicable to East Jerusalem, as it is to other territories under occupation.

The Council stresses the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement, which is based on a common commitment to the peace process. In this context it calls on Israel to give clear practical demonstration of its confirmed intention to implement fully the agreements already reached with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The Union believes that urgent progress in the following areas is crucial to the peace process:

(a) Timely implementation of the agreements reached, including completion of the first phase of Israel's troop redeployment, notably from Hebron, and the release of Palestinian prisoners;

(b) Positive steps to alleviate the economic plight of the Palestinians, including the early lifting of the closures, guaranteeing safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank and the lifting of obstacles to international aid efforts and the realization of infrastructural projects (e.g., Gaza airport, Gaza harbour, industrial zones);

(c) Resumption of full cooperation in order to ensure internal security, both in Israel and in the areas under Palestinian authority;

(d) Refraining from measures that prejudice the outcome of the final status negotiations, including annexation of land, demolition of houses, new settlement construction and expansion of settlements;

(e) Engagement of the next stage of negotiations as set down in the Declaration of Principles.

The Union welcomes the initiative to host a meeting in Washington between the parties. It hopes this meeting will lead to the recommencement of constructive negotiations on the basis of the principles of Madrid and the terms of the Declaration of Principles.

The security partnership that was created between Israel and the Palestinians has been one of the main achievements of the peace process. We call on both sides to dedicate themselves to recovering the trust and cooperation that epitomized the spirit of the peace process. Now more than ever the Union encourages the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to cooperate at all levels. Good neighbourly policies are indispensable to Israel's security in the long term. That security can be found only on the basis of a renewed partnership between Israel and its Palestinian neighbours.

As it declared at the Florence European Council in June 1996, peace in the Middle East is a vital interest of the European Union. Accordingly, the Union is ready to play an active part in efforts to recommence the negotiations, commensurate with its interests in the region, and on the basis of its major contribution to the peace process so far. The Union is currently preparing a Ministerial Troika visit to the Middle East for talks with the main parties in the peace process.

X. COMMISSIONER-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST REPORTS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In accordance with past practice, the General Assembly agenda item on Palestine refugees was allocated to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly. The Committee had before it the annual report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/51/13) and a number of other reports submitted by the Secretary-General. The reports were summarized as follows in a press release issued at Headquarters (GA/SPD/100):

According to the report of the Commissioner-General of the UNRWA (A/51/13), the last year saw continued emphasis on support for the Middle East peace process and the improvement of socio-economic conditions within the Palestine refugee community. However, advances in the peace process, including the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank and the holding of Palestinian elections, were followed by escalating violence against Israelis in early 1996 and the subsequent closing of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Such security-related restrictions interfered with the Agency's operations, as it completed the historic relocation of its headquarters to its area of operations.

At mid-1996, the outlook for the Palestine refugees and the Agency was less promising than it had been one year earlier, the report notes. The turning point that had appeared on the horizon at that time did not materialize. The Agency was confronted by mounting concerns about security, emphasis on contradictory interests among parties, and increased questioning of the peace process. The Agency was simultaneously caught between the growing humanitarian needs of the Palestine population and the limits on the resources available to it.

The report states that the Agency's financial position grew increasingly serious with a fourth consecutive structural deficit foreseen for 1996, and financing for the regular programmes coming under increasing strain. Regular UNRWA programmes provided education, health and relief services to 3.3 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria,

the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Its 637 schools accommodated 421,854 pupils, and a network of 123 out-patient facilities handled 6.6 million visits.

The Agency's commitment to the peace process was demonstrated in its Peace Implementation Programme, whose level of activity was beginning to represent an increasingly large part of all its activities on the ground, the report states. Pledges and contributions of $68.9 million received last year led to a total of $192.6 million by mid-1996 since the Agency's establishment. Funds were used to improve infrastructure, create employment and enhance socio-economic conditions in the five fields of operation. The Programme also supported rehabilitation of refugee shelters, provision of sewerage and drainage systems in camps and other activities.

The report states that in the first half of the reporting period, progress continued towards the goals of the Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization Declaration of Principles on Self-Government Arrangements of 13 September 1993, and subsequent implementation agreements. Under the superseding Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, Israeli forces began redeploying out of several West Bank cities and 450 towns and villages, where the Palestinian Police Force assumed security responsibilities. The 20 January election of the Palestinian Council broadened self-government.

The UNRWA supported those elections in a number of ways to reinforce the achievements of the peace process and expand opportunities to strengthen the Palestinian Authority-UNRWA partnership, the report goes on. "For the first time since 1967 most Palestinians in the West Bank were no longer in direct contact with Israeli forces and were largely able to manage their own affairs", the report states.

Despite the Israeli Prime Minister's assassination and escalating violence late in 1995, optimism continued to prevail respecting the peace process, the report states. However, the series of bomb attacks by Palestinians in February and March, which killed 56 Israelis, reversed that momentum. Israel postponed indefinitely negotiations and redeployment of military forces in Hebron, which was to have been completed by March, and began to separate the West Bank from Israel. By mid-1996, the peace process was stalled and future steps remained unclear.

Certain developments after the end of the reporting period led the Agency to hope that official negotiations on the peace process would soon resume, the report states. West Bank clashes between Palestinian civilians and Israeli forces declined markedly during the period under review, and 17 Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers, as compared to 86 in the preceding reporting period.

Nevertheless, tensions remained, as Israeli authorities continued to impose security measures, including the demolition of houses, arrests, curfews and temporary closures of educational and religious institutions, the report continues. "At the close of the reporting period, some 3,200 Palestinians, including many refugees, remained in detention."

Under the Interim Agreement, international observers from the Temporary International Presence arrived in Hebron in May, where clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers and settlers continued, the report goes on to say. As the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during nearly half of the reporting period inhibited economic activity, exacerbated unemployment, and contributed to socio-economic deterioration, emergency job creation for 2,376 individuals was provided under the Peace Implementation Programme.

The virtual halt of the Agency's West Bank operations during the 11-day closure in March, following bomb attacks on Israeli targets, represented a departure from agreements with Israeli authorities that were in effect since 1967, the report states. The Agency nevertheless continued to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority. Assistance included relinquishment of an uninhabited refugee camp site at Nu'eima in the Jericho area to the Palestinian Authority in 1995 and technical support for a model village in that

camp. Classrooms and teachers for 4,100 children of refugees and training courses for the Authority's education department were also provided.

According to the report, services were also provided to maintain 25 schools, to build 15 playgrounds, to maintain and repair sewers and storm drains and to improve human resources in maternal health and family planning. The Agency disbursed a total of $38.9 million for members of the Palestinian police from September 1994 through July 1995. It also emphasized senior-level contact between programme departments responsible for education, health and relief and social services sectors, and their counterparts within the Palestinian Authority.

The UNRWA entered a new phase in its history with the return of its headquarters to the area of operations, which began in February, the report states. In July 1996, the Office of the Commissioner-General, as well as the Administration, Legal and Finance, External Relations and Public Information Departments were relocated from Vienna to Gaza. Other departments joined the Agency's Amman headquarters. The resulting streamlining and integration of headquarters and field operations effected longer-term cost savings.

The report states that the Agency's financial situation continued to worsen during the reporting period with an $8.4 million deficit for 1995 and a fourth consecutive deficit expected for 1996. The combined effect of austerity measures and the lack of sufficient funds prevented Agency services from expanding to meet demand. Belt-tightening efforts progressively downgraded the level of services and generated longer-term costs, and cumulatively eroded the ability to maintain core functions for the refugee population. The resulting choice facing the Agency was either to drift towards insolvency or to decide to withdraw entirely from certain core programmes or other areas.

In resolution 50/28 A, the General Assembly noted with profound concern that the structural deficit problem confronting the Agency portended an almost certain decline in living conditions of the Palestine refugees and therefore had possible consequences for the peace process. An extraordinary meeting was scheduled for September to address those issues. The Commissioner-General decided to undertake a management review with the assistance of external consultants to energize institutional reforms that would make the UNRWA more adaptable and more responsive to the needs of Palestine refugees.

To promote self-reliance of the refugee community and ensure the longer-term viability of UNRWA programmes and services, the report states that the Agency sought to involve refugees actively in providing services and assuming greater responsibility for their own future. As a result of institution building and other initiatives, local committees managed over 60 per cent of the women's programme centres as well as community rehabilitation and youth activity centres.

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Also before the Committee is the special report of the Commissioner-General of the UNRWA on the critical state of the UNRWA's finances (A/51/495), conveyed in a note by the Secretary-General. The report draws attention to the Agency's serious structural deficit, the impact of austerity measures undertaken to reduce that deficit on the quality of services to Palestine refugees and the implications of reduced services for the stability of the region.

In his note, the Secretary-General writes that funds pledged at an extraordinary meeting of major donors and host governments held in Amman on 23 September would allow the Agency to meet minimum obligations for 1996. However, the structural deficit would continue into future years unless the gap between the essential needs of Palestine refugees and resources is closed. The Secretary-General emphasizes his support for the Commissioner-General's appeal for adequate funds to bridge the projected 1997 gap and deal with the Agency's deficit.

The Commissioner-General writes that for the first time in its history, the UNRWA suffered continuing shortfalls in its regular budget in recent years, owing mainly to stagnant or declining

contributions and increasing needs, resulting from demographic growth, new refugee registrations and inflation. The deficit and the Agency's austerity measures affected the quality of services provided to the 3.3 million Palestine refugees registered with the Agency.

At an extraordinary meeting of major donors and host countries, it had been pointed out that in light of the UNRWA's unique role in the region, the deterioration or reduction of its services would be potentially destabilizing, the report states. That would be immediately interpreted as reflecting a weakening of the commitment of the international community to resolve the problem of the Palestine refugees.

When peace negotiations had been in full swing, the report continues, the international community had recognized the importance of demonstrating the benefits of peace for Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Donors had generously responded to the Agency's Peace Implementation Programme by providing funds for special projects in all fields. However, with the peace process having reached a more delicate stage in its evolution, it was more critical that Palestine refugees be able to sustain their hopes for a successful outcome.

Pledges at the Amman meeting totalled almost $15 million, of which $11.25 million was for the UNRWA's regular budget, the Commissioner-General writes, which, together with promised funds subject to parliamentary approval, would allow the Agency to meet its minimum obligations for 1996. It was hoped that funds made available by the international community, together with the Agency's internal reforms, would do away with the structural deficit and set the Agency back on the right track.

Also before the Committee is the report of the working group on UNRWA financing (A/51/509), containing information on the origin and background of the working group, its activities during 1996, the financial situation of the UNRWA and concluding remarks.

The report states that two meetings of the working group were held on 13 September and 14 October to consider recent developments in the UNRWA financial situation and to prepare the report to the Assembly. The Agency ended the 1994-1995 biennium with an adjusted deficit of $14.4 million in its regular budget. The hard consecutive annual deficit reduced the Agency's working capital by more than half, despite efforts adopted to bring income and expenditure in line. Cost-saving austerity measures imposed from 1993 to 1996 were now having a detrimental impact on the quality of services to the refugee population.

Two meetings of major donor and host Governments were held at Amman, on 8 and 9 May and 23 September 1996, to address the Agency's financial situation, the report states. About $14 million was pledged in support of the Agency's work in 1996.

The report concludes with the working group's expression of concern for the financial situation facing the Agency at the end of 1996. The depletion of its working capital and the emergence of the structural deficit had serious implications for both the Agency and the Palestine refugees.

According to the report, the working group feels that the General Assembly must be more actively engaged than in previous years in ensuring that UNRWA is given the resources it needs to fulfil the mandate which the international community has given it, particularly in view of the natural growth in the refugee population, worsening socio-economic conditions and the potentially destabilizing effect on an already volatile political situation of any significant reduction in the Agency's activities.

The working group applauds steps already taken by the Commissioner-General to improve UNRWA internal management. It calls for greater clarity regarding harmonization of UNRWA activities with those of the Palestinian Authority and host Governments. "In the meantime, the working group believes that UNRWA should be circumspect about taking on additional capital commitments which strain its existing resources

and which will lead to recurrent cost implications." The report further states that continuation of chronic structural deficits could force the Agency to make cuts and reductions in its core programme areas of education, health care and social services.

Governments are urged to consider making additional contributions to finance Agency deficits and to ensure that support of emergency and special programmes, the Peace Implementation Programme, the European Gaza Hospital Project and the costs of relocating the Agency's Vienna headquarters to the area of operations will not divert or decrease contributions to the Agency's regular programmes.

The report of the Secretary-General on revenues derived from Palestine refugees' properties (A/51/371) states that he received a reply from Israel dated 3 May in response to his request that the Israeli Government provide information on the steps it had taken to implement relevant provisions of Assembly resolutions 50/28 A to G of 6 December 1995, which called on Israel to render all facilities and assistance to the Secretary-General in protecting Arab property, assets and property rights in Israel and to establish a fund for the receipt of income derived on behalf of the rightful owners.

In its reply, Israel reiterates that while the number of resolutions regarding the UNRWA has been reduced in the past years from 10 to 7, the content of those resolutions remains occupied with political issues irrelevant to the work for which the UNRWA was responsible, and thus is detached from the new reality. It states that the UNRWA can play an important role in promoting the social and economic advancement foreseen in the agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and looks forward to continuing to cooperate with the Agency.

The report of the Secretary-General on offers by Member States of grants and scholarships for higher education, including vocational training, for Palestine refugees (A/51/370) states that in 1995-1996 Japan awarded 10 fellowships through the UNRWA. The Government of Switzerland awarded scholarships to Palestine refugees through the UNRWA scholarship programme. Sixty-two students graduated between 1993 and 1995; 221 students from the UNRWA area of operation were still pursuing their university studies in 1995-1996.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council granted 175 fellowships to Palestine refugee educational staff of the UNRWA between 1981 and 1994 and had offered five new awards to Palestinian students since October 1995. In 1995, the World Health Organization received 43 applications from the West Bank and Gaza Strip for fellowships scheduled to begin in late 1995. Three applications submitted to the World Intellectual Property Organization to train UNRWA staff members were being considered for courses conducted during 1995-1996, and two applications were being considered for 1996-1997.

Four scholarships were offered by the United World College of the Adriatic in Italy, Pearson College in Canada, Armand Hammer College in the United States and the Li Po Chun in Hong Kong in 1996.

Also before the Committee was a report of the Secretary-General on the matter of the University of Jerusalem "Al-Quds" for Palestine refugees (A/51/476). The University's establishment had first been requested by the Assembly in its resolution 36/144 G. In his report, the Secretary-General reviews his efforts to complete a functional feasibility study on establishing the proposed university. He requested that the Government of Israel facilitate the visit of a United Nations expert who would assist the Secretary-General in the preparation of that study. The Acting Permanent Representative of Israel had sent a reply to that request in which Israel's opposition to the university was reiterated.

The report of the Secretary-General on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (A/51/369) reiterates that the Agency was not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees, nor was it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who were not registered as refugees. Its information is based on requests by returning registered refugees for transfer of their entitlements for services to the areas to which they have returned and subsequent correction of records. So far as is known

to the Agency, between 1 July 1995 and 30 June 1996, 84 refugees registered with the UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 329 to the Gaza Strip. Thus, the estimated number of displaced registered refugees who were known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 was about 15,280. The Agency was unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who had returned.

XI. DPI ANNOUNCES TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PALESTINIAN JOURNALISTS

The following press release was issued on 11 September 1996 announcing a training programme organized by the United Nations Department of Public Information (PAL/1833, PI/967):

Ten Palestinian journalists from broadcast and print media will participate in a training programme to be organized by the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI).

The programme, from 16 September to 8 November, is designed to strengthen the participants' professional capacity as information media practitioners.

During the programme, the journalists will attend briefings by officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies, as well as with representatives of media organizations in the United States; participate in a skills training internship at Cable News Network headquarters at Atlanta; attend two weeks of special classes at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs; and obtain on-the-job training by serving as a temporary United Nations correspondent, covering United Nations meetings and activities on behalf of their media organization.

This is the second programme being organized by DPI to assist the Palestinian people in building and strengthening their media capability. The first programme was organized last year, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

The 10 journalists who will participate in this year's training programme are: Mazen Abdallah, Al Bilad; Monir Abu Rizeq, Al Hayat Al Jadida; Abdul Rahman Al-Qasem, WAFA News Agency; Hussain Abd El Kader Alian, PBC Television; Majeda El Batsh, Al Ayyam; Ala'a El-Dein Mashharawi, Al-Quds; Nihaya Qawasmi, Al Ittihad; Bana B. Sayeh, Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre; Adli Haider Shorab, PBC Television; Muhammed Yosef Wahiedi, Director for International Cooperation, Press Office, Ministry of Planning, the Palestinian Authority.

XII. UNCTAD AND UNDP POSTPONE WORKSHOP ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EMERGING INTERNATIONAL TRADING SYSTEM FOR THE PALESTINIAN ECONOMY

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) prepared and postponed two joint workshops on the emerging international trading system and the Palestinian economy, as reflected in UNCTAD press releases No. 17 of 19 September 1996 and No. 19 of 27 September 1996, reproduced below:

19 September 1996

At the request of the Palestinian Authority, UNCTAD and UNDP will organize two workshops in the Palestinian territory on the emerging international trading system and its implications for the Palestinian economy. The first workshop will take place on the West Bank (Bir Zeit University)

from 28 to 30 September and the second in the Gaza Strip (Rashad Al-Shawwa Center) on 1 and 2 October.

The main agenda items are:

- The emerging global economy and the new international trading system, the World Trade Organization (WTO);
- The current situation of the Palestinian economy and the external trade sector;
- Market and commodity diversification potentials, especially with regional partners;
- General presentation on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Uruguay Round and WTO, with special reference to the agreements on textiles, clothing and agriculture;
- Services.

The issue of Euro-Mediterranean policy in relation to WTO accession will also be discussed. Bilateral consultations will be organized between the experts and the Palestinian participants.

Some 50 Palestinian experts from the private and public sectors are expected to participate in these informative meetings, which are organized under the auspices of the Palestinian Ministry of Economy and Trade and the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction of the Palestinian Authority. The WTO, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and international experts will also participate in the deliberations of both workshops.

These workshops are being organized within the framework of the UNCTAD/UNDP programme of technical cooperation activities for the Arab countries on WTO issues, as well as within the framework of UNCTAD's programme of assistance to the Palestinian people. Other Arab countries have already benefited from such workshops organized as part of the UNCTAD/UNDP programme, including Morocco, Lebanon, Libya, Bahrain, Sudan and Jordan.

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For more information, please contact Said Guehria, Technical Cooperation Coordinator, International Trade Division, UNCTAD, telephone: 41 22 907 57 08 or fax: 41 22 907 00 44; or Carine Richard-Van Maele, UNCTAD Press Officer, on telephone 41 22 907 5816/28, or fax 41 22 907 00 43, or e-mail: amanda.waxman@unctad.org.

27 September 1996

In view of recent developments in the Palestinian territory, the joint UNCTAD/UNDP workshops on the emerging international trading system and its implications for the Palestinian economy have been postponed. The workshops were scheduled to be held from 28 to 30 September and on 1 and 2 October 1996 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively (see note to correspondents No. 17). The workshops will be rescheduled at a later date.

XIII. WORLD BANK PLEDGES CONTINUED STRONG SUPPORT TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

On 6 September 1996, the World Bank issued the following press release on Palestinian assistance (No. 97/46S):

WASHINGTON, 6 September 1996—World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn today met with Dr. Nabeel Sha'ath, Palestinian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, and other members of a Palestinian delegation. The meeting took place following the 5 September session of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) on Palestinian Assistance, of which the World Bank is the Secretariat.

Mr. Wolfensohn welcomed the historic meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat of 4 September, observing that this meeting had established a more favourable atmosphere for

addressing the critical problems that face the Palestinian economy.

The Bank has committed US$ 135 million to support the international effort and, with the support of the Bank's Board, will continue and even intensify this effort. The economic package is a vital element of the peace accords between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The projects financed by the World Bank, and others under preparation by the donor community, will be presented and discussed in the forthcoming Consultative Group meeting for the West Bank and Gaza, to be held on 19 November 1996.

The AHLC meeting was notified that about US$ 2.2 billion of the US$ 2.9 billion pledged to the Palestinians since the signing of the Declaration of Principles had now been committed. Additional commitments are expected at the Consultative Group meeting in November. Total disbursements have reached more than US$ 1 billion, though disbursements for 1996 are lagging: only US$ 287 million this year so far, as compared with a 1996 target of US$ 500 million.

Unemployment is a huge economic problem in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Bank will continue to finance employment-generating projects from its own resources as well as working with donors who want to target their contribution to employment generation.

The Bank also believes there is an urgent need to create a favourable legal and incentive environment for the private sector in the West Bank and Gaza in order to attract the capital that is vital to sustained growth and a long-term reduction in unemployment. Finally, it is equally urgent for all sides involved to clarify the rules of the game pertaining to the movement of people and goods, so that private economic activity can develop.

XIV. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATION

1. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights, in its closure update No. 13 of 24 September 1996, reports on the closure imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip. This update includes information on denying access for Gazan patients to Israeli and West Bank hospitals; continued restrictions on commercial transactions in the Gaza Strip; denying access for Gazan workers in Israel; denying access for Gazan students to their West Bank universities and continued restrictions on family visits to Palestinian prisoners inside Israel. Copies are available from the Center [Tel/Fax: + (07) 824 776, 825 893].

2. Middle East International, a biweekly publication, is available from P.O. Box 53365, Temple Heights Station, Washington, D.C. 20009. Issue No. 584 of 20 September 1996 includes articles on the meeting between President Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu; Prime Minister Netanyahu's first 100 days; US policy on Israeli settlements and the closure of the West Bank and Gaza.

3. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights, on 26 September 1996, issued three urgent communiqués concerning grave breaches of human rights by Israeli soldiers on Palestinian civilians, a bloody day in the Gaza Strip and Palestinians killed and injured in the Gaza Strip by Israeli forces. Copies are available from the Center [Tel/Fax: (07) 24 776, 825 893].

4. Middle East International, a biweekly publication, is available from P.O. Box 53365, Temple Heights Station, Washington, D.C. 20009. Issue No. 536 of 25 October 1996 includes articles on five years since Madrid; the Palestinian's hand strengthens against Israel; President Chirac's visit to the Middle East; Netanyahu's colonialist revival and why Israel needs a Palestinian State.